

Interconnected threads of input on Mill Plaza proposal's impact on the Neighborhood

To: The Durham Planning Board / From: Joshua Meyrowitz, 7 Chesley Dr / December 29, 2021

I write to point out consistencies among four forms of input you have received from me and others about “external impacts” to the abutting properties and neighborhood that would result from the Mill Plaza proposal:

- 1. The sample videos I showed at the May 19, 2021 Public Hearing** (also submitted as part of the posted: “Crucial Conditional-Use Zoning Variables: Buffers, Distance, Scale, Hours of Activity, and *Type of Tenants*,” [Joshua Meyrowitz 8-19-21](#) (has hot links to YouTube videos in it).
- 2. Nationally recognized experts’ research on college-student nightlife:** My summary of [Geographer Blake Gumprecht on the “Residential Mosaic” Essential for Successful College Towns](#), and direct input to you from [Prof. Karen G. Weiss Expert Testimony Re: Student Housing impacts 8-19-21](#). These experts describe how poor zoning decisions can increase “crime rates,” with no change in actual student behavior.
- 3. Deputy Chief of Police David Holmstock’s** [Letter from the Durham Police Department 8-31-21](#). This closely-related input (on a Plaza food truck application) testifies to the on-site and neighborhood trouble drunk students gathering in the Plaza would likely cause for everyone, including the police.
- 4. Oral testimony from former Town Council Chair Jay Gooze**, at the December 8, 2021 Public Hearing on Mill Plaza, which starts at 8:27:12 pm ([video](#)).

Starting with the most recent input to you on December 8, Dr. Gooze spoke about “one more thing for you to think about and that is when it comes to the Conditional Use part about the effect on the adjacent neighborhood, and what it means to have a project like this there.” He continued in part (with my added emphasis):

In the 43 years I’ve been here, I’ve been able to see a number of problems that occur different than what we have now downtown with Madbury Commons, with Orion. **They’re not really adjacent to a residential neighborhood....** Young people who drink heavily.... [P]eople that I knew well....were bothered night after night at 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning with people screaming and yelling because there were in a state of inebriation....

And you might say “We have a noise ordinance that we passed. 10 o’clock, they can’t do that [scream and yell]. We’ll call the police.” But anybody who lives down there at that time knows, that you call the police, they come, they [the noisy heavy drinkers] have walked away. They’re still walking, and they’re still screaming farther away, someplace else....

So I want you to consider the fact that there are going to be a group of people coming from the Faculty area into a project in the plaza through Chesley Road path.... If you know how many calls the Bayview people called the police. Night after night, as people walked between them, urinated on their property. Swore to 2, 3, 4 o’clock in the morning. And the police couldn’t do anything about it....

Dr. Gooze’s descriptions echo the expert input that you received almost four months earlier from Chief Holmstock: “Residents living in the Faculty Development may be affected by noise generated by late night crowds or increased foot traffic walking through their neighborhood. Surrounding neighborhoods may also experience an increase in vandalism to property or littering in the local neighborhoods as intoxicated youth make their way to and from the location.” Students gathering in the Plaza and spreading out into the neighborhood would “increase the need for additional patrols” and add a “drain on [police] resources.

Dr. Gooze’s comments also resonate with Prof. Gumprecht’s research (in his [The American College Town](#)

and with the input you received directly from Prof. Weiss regarding her 15 years of college-town research. As Prof. Gumprecht describes: Family neighborhoods near student housing can become “battle sites in an undeclared but unresolved civil war” (p. 296). Drunk students are known to urinate or throw up on family lawns as well as abandon articles of clothing or other items that speak to sexual activity. Residents who complain to police or write to newspapers may receive threats and find their vehicles or homes vandalized (pp. 310-311).

Similarly, Prof. Weiss describes the limits of police enforcement once student zones and family zones are mixed: “One can’t call the police every few minutes every night. Moreover, since the police can’t arrive quickly enough to stop what disruption to family life has already happened, most residents who stay in the ‘mixed neighborhoods’ eventually become resigned to living with the student-caused noise and disturbances.” She adds:

Similar to secondhand smoke and the problems it causes for nonsmokers, secondhand harms from the party subculture have led to a range of harms to non-partying residents, including property damage, noise, litter (e.g., beer bottles, condoms, paper cups), verbal harassment, and a variety of other crimes and violations that can include vandalism, arson, fights and public urination. Together, these “nuisance” behaviors create stress and frustration for families living in these areas, and ultimately reduce the quality of life for entire neighborhoods. Parents express concerns about their children seeing or hearing things that may be inappropriate for their ages.

Regarding children seeing things that may be inappropriate for their ages when family neighborhoods are not protected, please recall a video from among the videos that I showed at the May 19, 2021, which I annotated in the submission to the Planning Board as: **“Student falling down drunk in middle of Mill Rd, scuffle between female & male student, car traffic has to stop because the students are blocking the travel lane.”**

As I mentioned in my public comment on August 25, 2021, I had received a warning email from YouTube on August 6, 2021, regarding that 40-second video, as follows:

We wanted to let you know that our team has reviewed your content and we don't think it's in line with our **Community Guidelines**. As a result, we've age-restricted the following content:

 **Video:** [Mill Rd & Faculty Rd Oct 4 2020, 12:15am \(00:40\)](#)

We haven't applied a strike to your channel, and your content is still live for some users on YouTube....

What "age-restricted" means

We age-restrict content when we don't think it's suitable for younger audiences. This means it will not be visible to users who are logged out, are under 18 years of age, or have Restricted Mode enabled. It also won't be eligible for ads. Learn more about [age restrictions](#).

In short, children under 18 throughout the world will not be allowed to watch the 40-sec age-restricted YouTube video of drunk UNH students at the edge of the Faculty Neighborhood on Mill Road. Yet, *if* the Mill Plaza – long a buffer for the neighborhood from the “college-student zones” in Durham – becomes a new locus of college-student life, children of Durham’s Faculty Neighborhood will more routinely experience the sorts of behavior and debris described in the input you have received. With the barring of Plaza-tenant cars from the site, students will radiate into the adjoining Faculty Neighborhood paths and streets for pick-ups and drop offs, and more. As all four sources above suggest, **these are *not* impacts that can be controlled by “on-site” plaza management.**

In combination, this input speaks clearly to threats to the health, safety, and welfare of the community and, specifically, to how the scale, scope, and siting of the pending Mill Plaza application violates multiple “external impacts on the neighborhood” criteria for [Conditional Use](#) approval for mixed-use with residential. Thank you.